

Jan: 1896.

L' U MILE P I A N T A.

FOR THE CHILDREN'S SAKE.

MY DEAR BAIRNS,

Your editor invites me to write to you in the first number of the *L' Umile Pianta* and, as she does not give me any particular subject to write upon, I am going to indulge myself with a general gossip, as there are many things I want to say.

And, first, let me congratulate you on the birth of your Magazine and of your Old Students' Association. I delight greatly in both as evidences of *esprit de corps* and of the enthusiasm which some of you complain that you lack. But then to complain that one lacks shows that one desires, and desiring is more than half-way to having. I greeted your first type-written number with the sort of tender pleasure one has in a grand-child. These efforts of yours show that you are a body, a living body, growing, I hope, not only by accretion from without—the addition of more and more House of Education students—but by vital growth from within, the steady increase in purpose, power, and effort in each one of you. Do not let the endless succession of small things crowd great ideals out of sight and out of mind:—

“ 'Tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do,”

says Browning, and it is one of those profound sayings which should exert a steady influence on our lives. Let us never lose sight of our aims. Think of it—already House of Education students are educating between two and three hundred children. Work together, let each one labour to produce a human being at his very best, and what a difference those three hundred children will make to the world in the future. It is impossible to put limits to the

power and influence of even one good man or woman, so that any one of you, by laying herself out utterly for a single child, may bless the world in unimaginable ways.

But if it is important never to lose sight of what we "Would do," so is it well that we should realize that the most trivial incident of the day, the execution of every moment's work, makes for, or away from, the ideal we work for. This, I suppose, is the meaning of the Badge you have chosen with remarkable unanimity. I have found your action in this matter very inspiring. Your deliberate choice of the "humble plant" as best expressing your aims gives me a cheering sense that you realize the meaning of our work and also gives me, for my own part, many helpful thoughts about the meaning of humility. You will smile if I say it is a lofty aim, and yet it is the loftiest possible to us as human beings to endeavour ourselves to copy the "example of that Great Humility." Practically I think this is how it works. To us, who take the Rush for our Badge, there are no little things, no things that do not matter. We know that every letter a child forms is a detriment or a gain to his character. Every dawdling or diligent, every dull or bright, half-hour is not a thing by itself, but becomes part and parcel of the child, of the whole we are labouring to effect. Another thing, I think, our Rush probably means to all of us is, that we work at things both great and small without any thought at all of our own honour and renown. I am glad you have given us this Badge, dear friends. I expect to gain great help from the constant inspiration of it, and I know you will like the idea of helping me in the very way you have all been good enough to say I have helped you. I think, perhaps, that now you are co-workers, labouring together with me for the self-same ends, we shall understand each other more perfectly and draw even more closely together than we did while you were in training, loyal and responsive as I found you every one.

Please write to me fully and often, believing that if you get little in reply it is not for want of love on my part, but because there is really much to do. Your letters cheer me very much. (One member writes:—"If I were to tell you the countless little successes (which make the big ones) that I constantly meet with, not so much in teaching as in training, I should fill volumes. I think

that part of my education at Ambleside so interesting and, I must say, the methods never do fail. It is *charming* to work them out, but I almost wish I had quite tiny children to try on."

I dare say you could all send a similar record of experiences, and I imagine there is a sort of artistic pleasure in putting the fine touches to character.

To return to "enthusiasm." The writer of a paper on this subject in your last issue will like to know that other members caught fire from her though she herself complains that she is burning low. It is astonishing how little fire will kindle a torch, and this is a thought to encourage us in depressed moments if we were not all too healthy minded to have any such moments! But, please remember that enthusiasm is a fire that throws out light and heat at a cost of constant waste of fuel. Do not for a moment suppose that you can warm yourselves and others for months together upon the original stock you brought from Ambleside. Every day new "thoughts that burn" must be supplied or the fire will go out and present the dreariest of all spectacles, a desolate hearth. Where shall we get new ideas? These are, as Wordsworth says of pleasure, "cast in stray gifts through the world, to be found by whoever will seek." *Read*, not only in The Book, which one cannot read without many life-giving thoughts, but almost any good book, poetry, biography, history, essays, *good* novels,—all will supply our need. You will find that if we read thoughtfully and steadily and only that which is worth reading, daily nourishment of stimulating thought will come to us; and, however foreign the subject may be, what we read, if it is worth reading, will help us to do our work better and will give us fresh thoughts to impart to the children. Never be without a really good book on hand. If you find yourself sinking to a dull commonplace level, with nothing particular to say, the reason is probably that you are not reading and, therefore, not thinking. I think, if you will read and ponder your *Parents' Review* month by month, you will find that it stimulates your educational thought in many directions and keeps you from drifting into mere routine. There are many other ways of gaining ideas, but I have room to mention only this one.

I fear I am exceeding the space allowed to me so will offer just one other little word of counsel—*study*. I know that all good teachers have some study each day in preparing for the next day's work, but, besides this, study some two or three subjects, definitely on your own account. Do not think this a selfish thing to do, because the advantage does not end with yourself. Every hour of definite study enriches your mind and increases your power, so that, the more you study in your spare time, the more there is in you to bestow upon your pupils. I think I have already advised most of you to join the College by Post. I cannot say enough in praise of this most excellent scheme, and I think we are all grateful to the Founder, Miss Petrie (now Mrs. Carus Wilson). There is hardly a subject upon which one cannot get directions, suggestions, examinations, all possible helps to private study; and this, at practically no expense. Communicate with the Vice-President, Miss E. Waller, St. John's Hall, Highbury, London, N., saying what subjects you would like to study. One Divinity subject is incumbent, and I should advise *Clews to Holy Writ*.

There are so many things to say that I see no reason for stopping for a week to come, but my space will not last out. So with loving New Year's Greetings, which I wish could be face to face,

I am,

Your always affectionate friend,

C. M. MASON.

EDITORIAL.

THE promotion of our Old Students' Association and the appearance of the first number of our Magazine should mark an epoch in our lives as teachers. The fact that the idea of forming an association has been taken up most warmly and unanimously by the ex-students serves to show that we all feel the need of united work.

We have all along been fellow workers, but we are now beginning to see that better work may be done if we form some definite bond amongst ourselves than if we go on working as isolated individuals. We also begin to want some means of communication with one another. While there were only a few students all were linked together, but now that there have been several "generations" many are almost entirely unknown to each other. Our Magazine we hope will introduce us to one another.

Our Association then is to be of practical use to us all, and in joining it we take upon ourselves certain responsibilities. Virtually we undertake to do all we can to help each other and to advance the work in which we are all engaged.

This work of ours is one involving very serious responsibilities, and which needs much patience and much selflessness. We all know that there are times of almost overwhelming depression and despair when perhaps a few encouraging words from others who have passed through just those difficulties which are confronting us might lighten our burden and make us ready to go on patiently and hopefully. Some may have overcome one difficulty, some another, therefore it is the *duty* of everyone to write anything which might be of use to others. After the training we have had, we must